



Fish of Zion National Park



Virgin River Spinedace

The Virgin River Habitat

Flowing through Zion National Park are the North and East forks of the Virgin River and their various tributaries. These streams are all part of the Virgin River drainage, which is part of the larger Colorado River Basin.

The fish of the Virgin River drainage appear to have evolved in isolation from other populations in the Colorado River basin. These native fish are adapted to unique local conditions, including heavy silt loads and wide fluctuations in water temperature and discharge.

Unfortunately, native fish of the Virgin River have experienced a population decline due to habitat fragmentation and the introduction of non-native species. Populations within Zion’s protected borders have fared better than those without.

Efforts are currently underway to restore disturbed habitat in much of the Virgin River drainage to provide for the recovery and protection of the native fish.

Fishing in Zion

Can I fish in Zion?
Yes. You can fish if you have a current Utah state fishing license. No license is required for children age 16 and younger. Only trout may be taken.

Is the fishing any good in the park?
The Virgin River, with it’s high temperatures and heavy silt loads, is not very good trout habitat.

Where can I get a fishing license?
The closest place to Zion where one may purchase a fishing license is in the town of Hurricane, 25 miles west of Zion National Park.

Virgin River spinedace *Lepidomeda mollispinis*

Identification: Laterally compressed body; bright, silvery sides with black spots or blotches.

Age and Size: Live up to three years and can reach over 4.7 inches (120mm) in length.

Habitat and Feeding: live in sandy/gravel bottomed pools adjacent to faster water where they feed on insects floating through the upper layers of water.

Range: Endemic to the Virgin River drainage in Utah, Arizona, and Nevada. They now occupy about 60% of their original range. Common in the Virgin River and North Creek in Zion.

Status: Protected as a state endangered species.



Speckled Dace *Rhinichthys osculus*

Identification: Extremely variable; dark olive back and sides heavily speckled with black; gold specks on back; possible dusky stripe along side. Males display bright orange coloration on mouth and base of fins during breeding.

Age and Size: Live up to three years and can reach 4.3 inches(110mm) in length.

Habitat and Feeding: prefer faster water, but can be found in slow water. Feed on insects and algae in either midwater or on the bottom.

Range: Native to all major wester drainages, including the Virgin River. Common in Zion.

Status: Not protected but not a game fish.



Flannemouth Sucker
Catostomus latipinnis

Identification: Green to blue-gray from above; narrow caudal peduncle (see arrow); deep notch in lower lip.
Age and Size: Likely to live more than 8 years and reach 22 inches (560 mm) in length.
Habitat and Feeding: Typically live in pools but also found in runs and riffles. Feed on algae and dead plant matter on the river bottom.

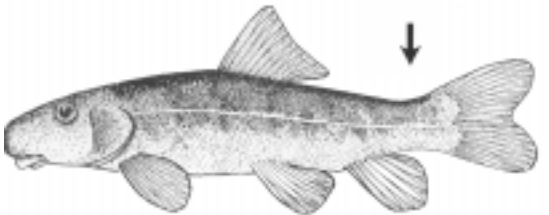
Range: Native to the Colorado river drainages, including the Virgin River. Common in Zion.
Status: protected as a state sensitive species.



Desert Sucker
Catostomus clarki

Identification: Tan to dark green from above; possible dusky stripes across back; thick caudal peduncle(see arrow).
Age and Size: Live 8 to 10 years and can reach 13 inches (330 mm) in length.
Habitat and Feeding: Live in pools. Feed in faster waters. Feed mostly on algae scraped from stones by cartilage-sheathed jaws.

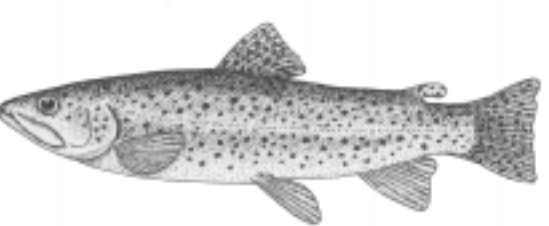
Range: Native to the lower Colorado river drainages, including the Virgin River. Common in Zion.
Status: protected as a state sensitive species.



Rainbow Trout
Oncorhynchus mykiss

Identification: Irregular black spots on back, side, and head; bluish or olive green on back; sides are lighter and silvery with reddish horizontal band.
Age and Size: Live up to 5 years and can reach 45 inches (114cm) in length. Those found in Zion are much smaller.
Habitat and Feeding: Prefer cold headwaters; live in wide range of habitats. Smaller trout feed mostly on insects. Larger trout feed on other fish.

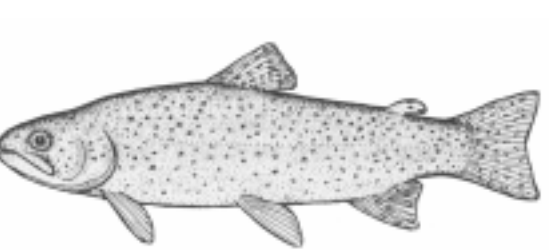
Range: Native to the Pacific coast. Introduced to the Virgin River. Uncommon in Zion.
Status:Game fish.



Cutthroat Trout
Oncorhynchus clarki

Identification: Back and sides are usually steel gray covered with spots; red or orange slash mark running along both sides of lower jaw.
Age and Size: Live up to 8 years and can reach 39 inches (99cm) in length. Those found in Zion are much smaller.
Habitat and Feeding: Prefer cool, clear water. Live in riffles, gravel bottom pools and under logs and overhung banks. Smaller trout feed mostly on insects. Larger trout feed on other fish.

Range: Native to western North America. Probably not native to the Virgin River. Uncommon in Zion.
Status:Game fish.



Brown Trout
Salmo trutta

Identification: Red and black spots on head and body; olive to dark brown from above; silver sheen on yellow brown side.
Age and Size: Live up to 10 years and can reach 40.5 inches (103cm) in length. Those found in Zion are much smaller.
Habitat and Feeding: Prefer cool waters. Adults live in pools and young live in pools and riffles. Smaller trout feed on zooplankton and bottom dwelling insects. Larger trout feed on other fish.

Range: Native to Europe and Asia. introduced to the Virgin River. Uncommon in Zion.
Status:Game fish.

